

From the Potting Shed

January 2024

www.mgofbc.org



Meeting news: Tuesday, Jan. 23

Bruce Crawford Barking Up the Right Tree

January's meeting will be virtual. The link will be sent in mid-January. Announcements at 7:20 pm; program to follow.

Bark is the stuff only a few people seem to admire and even fewer really understand. Bruce Crawford, a long-time proponent of unusual and fun plants, will



Bruce Crawford

explain this bark "stuff" at our Jan. 23 meeting. Bruce is the manager of horticulture for the Morris County Park Commission. He has a degree in biology from Bucknell University and studied landscape architecture and horticulture at Cook College, Rutgers University.

For nearly 25 years, Bruce had his own design/build gardening business that specialized in plantings for year-round interest. One of those gardens was featured in Fine Gardening magazine.

From 1987-2020, Bruce was an instructor in the Landscape Architecture program at Rutgers University. From 2005 to 2020, Bruce was the director of [Rutgers Gardens](#), the botanical garden for Rutgers University, and from 2020 to 2021 he was the state program leader for home and public horticulture with the NJ Agricultural Experiment Station. In 2021, he received the Award of Excellence from the National Garden Clubs.

Bruce lectures frequently to various groups and creates the [Plant of the Month](#) series for Rutgers NJAES. A true plant lover, he said he has yet to find a plant he doesn't like.

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From the Executive Board

By Arnie Friedman, Class of 2004

Happy New Year on behalf of your Executive Board. I am a long-time member of our board and serve as the Community Outreach Chair.

This January is a little different than most for the Master Gardeners of Bergen County. As you may know, according to our bylaws we elect a new president every two years. Officers may not serve more than two consecutive terms. I had my turn as president over 15 years ago.



Arnie Friedman

The usual process is that in September a nominating committee made up of board members recommends a slate of officers that the association votes on, and a new president takes office on Jan. 1.

Unfortunately, in 2023 the nominating committee had a tough time finding a person to fill the position of president. As a result, the board asked our outgoing president, Melody Corcoran, to stay on as interim president until we could resolve this issue. I am sure you would agree that Melody has done an excellent job in the last four years leading us out of the pandemic and back into a very active association.

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From the Executive Board

(Continued from page 1)

However, according to the rules, Melody cannot serve another full term. Luckily for us the nominating committee has found a candidate, Theresa Schneider, who will be presented to our members for a vote at our Jan. 23 meeting.

Why such a hard time filling this position as well as other positions on the board? I think it's partly the fact that many members aren't aware of what the board does and how important it is to the running of our association. The MG of BC is basically a volunteer organization that exists to provide a body of trained individuals to further the goals of Rutgers Cooperative Extension.

To achieve this goal and to offer the continuing education credits that we all need to stay certified, there's a lot of behind-the-scenes work that needs to be done. The treasurer keeps track of dues and donations; pays the bills for lecturers, hospitality, and other expenses; and files the required annual federal reports since we are a registered non-profit organization. Membership information has to be kept up to date; volunteer hours need to be verified, organized, and archived. Our program chair finds lecturers, secures the room for monthly meetings, and sees that lecture equipment is set up. The hospitality chair sees that there are drinks and snacks at every meeting and at special events.

The Potting Shed editor has to find, create, and edit content and distribute the newsletter. The board oversees funding for the MG of BC's participation in the Holiday Open House event as well as seeing that there is a committee to do the decorating. Other board members arrange and coordinate volunteers for special events. Then there's the managing of our website; arranging special trips; and coordinating the spring picnic. Your board also has two members who attend monthly meetings of the Rutgers Master Gardener Association of NJ.

As chair of the Community Outreach Committee, I manage requests for speakers to lecture to garden clubs, libraries, and other groups and arrange for volunteers for other outreach demonstrations and learning events. Like others on the board, I also contribute occasional articles to the Potting Shed.

So, you see, there's a lot that goes on behind the scenes that many MG members are not aware of. There's a big need for new blood and members to be involved in the workings of this association. If we don't

IN THE GARDEN

Turn over a new 'leaf' for the new year

By Janet Schulz, Class of 1988

January and February are the months to reflect and plan. The seed catalogs have started to arrive, and it is really hard to resist all they offer.

I don't do veggies; I don't have enough sun. But for those who do, try thinking out of the box. Maybe try a new variety of something you already grow or maybe consider something you have never tasted or grown. If you grow annuals from seed, think about a vine. They take so little room.

The challenge! A little pack of seed sometimes has many more than you can use, so think about sharing some of those that germinate. You just may be encouraging someone else to start growing from seed.



Janet's begonias (and other cuttings) under the lights.

Me? What am I doing? This is the time of year I take cuttings of my tender plants. I am becoming a begonia collector. Taking cuttings makes the plant become bushier and I always have plants to share.

Happy New Year and happy gardening.

("In the Garden," continued on page 3)

have continuing leadership the MG of BC will atrophy. Please consider volunteering to work behind the scenes. As a Master Gardener, you don't just have to maintain a garden. You can use your academic and business skills to help us be a better association.

Don't hesitate to call or email any one of us on board. The board meetings are open to all members. at 5:30 pm before every public meeting, so come early and listen to what we do.

Editor's note: Our January and February meetings will be virtual. Contact [Arnie](#) for the Zoom link for the board meeting. For contact information for other board members/committees, contact [Miriam Taub](#), Potting Shed editor and Class of 2011.

IN THE GARDEN

Winter color in the garden need not be dreary

By Janet Schulz, Class of 1988

Winter color need not be dreary and dark or just white as snow, green as holly, or tawny as miscanthus. There are a number of ways to celebrate color in the winter in New Jersey.



Photos by Janet Schulz

Nandina domestica: Heavenly color but despite its common name, it's not a bamboo!

When thinking of red berries in the winter most of us think of boxwood, holly, or *Ilex verticillata*, also called winterberry, but few of us think of nandina. *Nandina domestica* is also called heavenly bamboo. I think that may be why so many uninformed gardeners shy away from it. It is said to be invasive (in the southeast) because of the berries. Here in my garden in Bergen

County (more than 20-plus years) growing in damp shade it has never made another plant. That is one of the problems with common names: *Nandina* has absolutely nothing to do with bamboo. Beware of the dwarf variety; I hear it doesn't "berry" as well.

Hellebore niger usually starts to bloom around Thanksgiving. It's usually white, and what we call the flower is really not the flower but five sepals that surround the flower. The sepals can last for months, slowly fading from white, sometimes to pink to pale green.



Hellebore niger: Those white "flowers" are the sepals.

The leaves are evergreen, lasting one year after which they ought to be trimmed in late winter or early spring before or as the buds appear. This allows the emerging flowers to be shown at their best and protected from any fungus that might be on the leaves.

When you see a white, fall-blooming clematis most people automatically think sweet autumn clematis, but this may not be true. Sweet autumn clematis is an invasive vine with smooth or sometimes single-lobed leaves, whereas *Clematis virginiana*, also known as virgin's bower, our native clematis, has coarsely toothed trifoliate leaves and does not seed around as much.

Both have tawny-colored winter foliage and white, fuzzy seed pods the birds love for nesting material. They both bloom on new growth, so cut it down to about 12 inches in the fall to keep the seeds from spreading or wait until spring so the birds can use the seed heads for nests and you can enjoy the beauty. When purchasing one, be sure to read the label or check the leaves of a gifted plant so you know which variety you have.



Virgin's bower, our native clematis.

Trees are another thing of beauty in winter, not only for their structure but also their beautiful bark. Some have exfoliating bark, such as river birch, and others are mottled such as crape myrtle and certain kousa dogwoods.

It is this time of year when all trees show their beauty against a bright blue sky that we can celebrate all of nature's gifts.

MG OF BC NEWS

Deadline to enter volunteer, education hours is extended to Jan. 15

By Suzanne Danzig, Volunteer Records chair and Class of 2008

Happy New Year Master Gardeners! A friendly reminder to enter your 2023 volunteer and continuing education hours in the [Better Impact](#) system *now*. We have extended the deadline to Jan. 15.

Recording your hours is critical to maintaining your certification as a Master Gardener as well as getting credit for Bergen County with Rutgers Cooperative Extension.

This matters! If everyone who reads this enters their hours in [Better Impact](#), I will be inundated. But I am up for the challenge, so bring it on. As always, if you need assistance recording your hours, please reach out to [me](#) or [Karen Riede](#), horticultural assistant, and we will be glad to help. We so appreciate all of your efforts; now let's make them count.

2024 reminder: Dues

Thanks to all who have renewed your MG of BC membership for 2024! For those who haven't (yet) please mail your \$20 check, payable to the MG of BC, to our new address: **Master Gardeners of Bergen County, PO Box 824, Saddle River, NJ 07458.**

For the renewal form, visit our [website](#). As you scroll down the home page, the "Renew your membership now" box appears in the lower right. Click on "Download membership renewal form" and read the instructions to update your information for MG of BC records. Choose either 1, 2, or 3. By choosing 2, you can submit your information online. Contact [Theresa Schneider](#), Membership chair and Class of 2016, if you have questions about membership or the web directory. **Note:** Interns don't pay dues.

Voting for officers at the Jan. 23 meeting

The MG of BC Executive Board has approved the following slate of officers for a two-year term beginning this month:

- President: Theresa Schneider, Class of 2016 and
- Vice president: Lisa Yoler, Class of 2019.

A vote on this slate of officers will take place at our Jan. 23 public meeting at approximately 7:20 pm after any announcements. The meeting will be virtual, and a link will be sent later this month and will be posted on the home page of our [website](#). All certified MG of BC members are encouraged to vote. Any certified member can also submit a nominee for consideration at the virtual meeting.

Sad news to report

We recently learned that Virginia Korteweg, Class of 2004, died at her home in Florida in June. Click [here](#) for a story in the fall/winter issue of the Hackensack Tidelines, the Hackensack Riverkeeper's newsletter. When Virginia lived in River Edge, her home, Edgcroft, was frequently open to the public during the Garden Conservancy Open Days program.

WEBINARS

All times are Eastern.

Jan. 10, 7-8:15 pm: Bergen-Passaic Chapter, Native Plant Society of NJ sponsors The Common Plants Found in DeKorte Park. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

Jan. 11, 7-8 pm: Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies (Millbrook, NY) sponsors The Spongy Moths in our Yards and Forests. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register. Click [here](#) to learn about the Cary Institute.

Jan. 17, 7-8 pm: Penn State Extension sponsors Know Your Natives: Secrets to Seed Sowing and Germination. Fee: \$10. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

Jan. 17, 7-9 pm: Native Plant Society of NJ sponsors Wild Plant Culture: Restoring Native Edible and Medicinal Plant Communities. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

Jan. 18, 7-8:30 pm: Somerset Chapter, Native Plant Society of NJ sponsors Wildflowers in Winter. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

GOING BACK IN TIME – MG VOLUNTEER SITE HISTORY

Teaneck's Mary S. Topolsky Garden & Trail

First came the Hackensack River Greenway Through Teaneck in 2000, a 3.5-mile trail that follows the Hackensack River from Terhune Park at the south end to Brett Park at the north end.

Then came the Mary S. Topolsky Garden & Trail, dedicated in 2016 to the woman who encouraged the purchase of the property as an addition to the Hackensack River Greenway. Mary died in 2015 at age 75.

While the garden has been under the supervision of the Friends of the Hackensack River Greenway from the start, it's been less than a year that MGs have been volunteering there regularly. The volunteering began with a "blast" cleanup on a brisk Sunday in March 2023 when 17 MGs and several local volunteers came out to help. The result: 48 bags of debris were collected with plans to continue volunteering weekly.



Photo by Harriet Steiner

Fall 2023: The garden and trail 7½ years after the photo at left. This is the only section of the Hackensack River Greenway with a view of the river from River Road.

Through Teaneck Advisory Board and the Friends of the Hackensack River Greenway.

It was Mary with another Teaneck resident, Wally Cowen, who encouraged the township to purchase the property at 640 River Road, which would eventually bear her name. Teaneck used grant funds to buy the property in 2010 from the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Harriet Steiner, site coordinator of the Mary S. Topolsky Garden and Class of 2019, spoke with Mary's daughter, Diana Krefting, about her late mother. "Mary envisioned a beautiful garden that would be welcoming to visitors with disabilities," Harriet reported. In Mary's vision, that garden would contain areas for native plants; a habitat for birds, bees, butterflies, and other wildlife; a site for community events; and a trail to the Hackensack River.

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Photo courtesy of Marie Warnke

March 2016: The Mary S. Topolsky Garden in the making.

Who exactly was Mary S. Topolsky, and why was a garden named for her?

Mary was a Teaneck resident who had a career in fund-raising. She received a certificate in landscape design from the New York Botanical Garden, according to a Teaneck Garden Club publicity notice when she spoke to the group about Japanese gardens in 2012. Mary was a member of that club as well as a member of the Hackensack River Greenway

(Mary S. Topolsky Garden, continued from page 5)



Photo by Harriet Steiner

In the upper garden: Crabapples with the then-newly planted clethra near the fence.

“She maintained that she wanted to see something blooming at all times but not everything blooming at the same time,” Harriet said.

To make Mary’s vision a reality, a Friends of the Greenway committee led by Mary and Norma Goetz, a founding member of the Hackensack River Greenway, began planning the property’s transformation from an invasive-covered lot into a restful spot with a view of the Hackensack River.

Marie Warnke, a member of the Friends of the Hackensack River Greenway and site coordinator along with Harriet, recalled that Mary wanted to enhance the view of the garden from the street level and planned a circular sitting area with plantings in the center. At the slope between the upper and lower levels of the garden Mary planned a native rock garden. (The upper garden is at street level while the lower garden is the area near the river.) Sadly, Mary died before funding was received for plant material.

After Mary’s death, Norma Goetz and Marie Warnke, who was a member of the Township Council from 2000-2004 and became the liaison to the Hackensack River Greenway Advisory Board in 2000, suggested the property be named in Mary’s honor.

To fill the garden, Mary’s family requested that donations be made to the garden in her memory. The Friends of the Greenway contributed \$500 worth of native plants. Teaneck’s Shade Tree Advisory Board and Teaneck residents donated the river birch trees. Bergen County Audubon donated the crabapple trees.

When residents of the nearby Five Star Premier Residences learned of the ADA trail, they donated three benches and a trash can. A grant came from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions. The Teaneck Garden Club donated plants.

The Mary S. Topolsky Garden & Trail was dedicated Sept. 25, 2016, with Marie as host.

Since that time, Friends of the Hackensack River Greenway have maintained the garden. Richard Karp, a Friends of the Greenway member and MG Class of 2011, was a liaison for the MGs who installed plants in the garden’s infancy and who volunteered occasionally. However, once the Covid pandemic began, all volunteering stopped. Then in October 2022, when Richard could no longer be the site coordinator, the MG of BC sought a new coordinator. Harriet Steiner raised her hand.



Photo by Miriam Taub, Class of 2011

MG of BC volunteers, from left: Karen Shaner and Peter Cammarano, both Class of 2023; Harriet Steiner, site coordinator and Class of 2019; Lucy Jickling, Class of 2019.

As Harriet recalled. “I met Marie Warnke, who represented Friends of the Greenway and who would be my co-chair. I was totally overwhelmed by the condition. The knotweed, etc., had totally repossessed the garden [so] it was like starting a totally untouched area. But I fell in love with the view

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(Mary S. Topolsky Garden, continued from page 6)



Photo by Harriet Steiner

Fall 2023: Sitting area; clethra to the left have lost their leaves.

of the river and thought I really wanted to try to re-create Mary’s garden as she envisioned it, so I said yes.”

After that first official cleanup in March, Harriet set Thursday mornings as the group’s volunteer day. Along with Harriet, a dedicated team of Lucy Jickling, Class of 2019, and Karen Shaner and Peter Cammarano, both recently certified MGs from the Class of 2023, have been working to remove the invasives that took over during the Covid pandemic and to plant numerous trees and shrubs.

Harriet noted that Herb Arbeiter and Zoran Vukasovic (both Class of 2019) helped to plant 13 pink clethra in the fall. In addition, several local residents have volunteered along with Mary Topolsky’s daughter Diana; Diana’s husband Mark; their son (Mary’s grandson) Matt Krefting; and two of his friends, Matt Emeric and Peter Botbyl. Harriet credited the three young men with carving out an area of Japanese knotweed in the lower garden to make way for a willow and two oaks.

And speaking of knotweed, Harriet said that her team has been fighting the good fight. “We would clear an area until we couldn’t do any more, take a break, and then start putting down cardboard overlapping [it] and then covering it with 4 to 5 inches of mulch to deter it.”

The Mary S. Topolsky Garden is closed for the season. Harriet said that volunteers will meet in late January to prune the crabapple trees. Other plans for 2024 are to finish clearing and then planting the rock garden area along the ADA trail, redo the circle garden, and finish the area in front of the clethra. “That’s a start for now,” she said.

This article was compiled by Miriam Taub, Potting Shed editor and Class of 2011, with information provided by Harriet Steiner and Marie Warnke.

Editor’s note: Contact [Harriet](#) for more information about volunteering. Marie Warnke supervises additional workdays for Greenway volunteers. MGs can earn volunteer hours when they work on Thursdays or during Greenway-scheduled sessions.

EVENTS

Jan. 12, noon-5 pm; Jan. 13, 10 am-5 pm; Jan. 14, 10 am-4 pm: North Jersey Orchid Society and Rutgers School of Environmental Biology Floriculture Greenhouses sponsor the 2024 annual orchid show and sale, Douglass Student Center, 100 George St., New Brunswick. More than 500 blooming orchids grown in the Mid-Atlantic area will be on display; North Jersey Orchid Society members available to answer questions. Free admission and parking, however, vehicles must be registered in advance. Click [here](#) for vehicle registration information.

Jan. 18, 7 pm: Thielke Arboretum Education Center, 460 Doremus Ave., Glen Rock. Speaker: Elaine

Silverstein, Native Plant Society of New Jersey. Topic: Designing and Planting with Native Plants: Creating a Native Habitat. Seating is limited. Fee: \$10; 20% discount for Thielke members. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

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